

[In 2015, Will You Still Doing Good Work and Waiting for the Phone to Ring?](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on February 12th, 2015

Has a senior lawyer told you that key to client development is just doing good work? I would be surprised if you haven't heard that from someone.

I practiced law for 37 years. I was thinking recently how much has changed during that time. When I started we still used carbon paper and white out. Many of us did not keep time records because the bills simply said: Professional Services Rendered and a flat fee.



During my 37 years, I witnessed four eras of marketing and client development. As our profession went from one era to another it has become increasingly more challenging to get noticed and hired.

First Era-Smaller Firms, Local and Loyal Clients, Do Good Work

When I started practicing law in Roanoke, Virginia, there were far fewer lawyers and law firms were significantly smaller. I could walk down Jefferson Street and speak personally to almost each person I passed. Businesses typically hired local lawyers and business contacts were local.

Out of town businesses frequently determined which lawyers to consider by referring to the Martindale-Hubbell listings. Most lawyers did not do any marketing. They got business by “doing good work” getting an A-V Martindale-Hubbell rating, being visible in the community and waiting for the phone to ring.

Second Era-Unsolicited Contact

I refer to the second era as the unsolicited contact era. In the '80s lawyers and law firms in this era solicited business by creating brochures and sending out newsletters. Since most of the factual information in the brochures was similar, law firms tried to distinguish themselves by the slickness of the brochures and the photography.

Lawyers in this era also dropped in on clients and potential clients. The favorite line was: “I am going to be in _____ and I thought I would come by and visit.

Third Era-Websites and Branding Emerge

I refer to the third era as the webpage and branding era. In the '90s lawyers and law firms created web pages which mostly told clients how good the law firm was and rarely provided a client with anything of value.

Clients in this era could not tell one firm from another from their websites, so firms created branding taglines. You can see the branding slogans on the firm websites, firm advertisements or on the wall at airports. Take a look at [101 Law Firm Taglines-2009 Edition](#) and [101 More Law Firm Taglines – 2012 Edition](#).

At my old law firm the webpage had in big letters: “the JENKENS experience” and then in smaller letters: “the experience you deserve.” I frequently asked our marketing department what “the JENKENS experience” was because I wanted to make sure my clients knew when they were getting

it.



The only time a client mentioned the JENKENS experience to me was when he got a bill that was more than expected. He said: “I guess I got the JENKENS experience, the experience I deserve.” He did not mean for it to be humorous.

The Current ERA- Remarkable Differentiation

Based on a term [Seth Godin](#) uses, I believe that in the fourth era, lawyers and law firms have to either be remarkable or create content and value that clients find remarkable. Godin talks about three kinds of people. I will put it in the context of clients:

1. Clients who don't need the services you or your firm offer.
2. Clients who need the services you or your firm offer, but are using another lawyer or firm.
3. Clients who are ignoring you.

Godin says you can't market directly to the second and third group. “Instead, have them come to you.” How do you suppose you can get them to come to you? Godin suggests you have to create something “remarkable.”

What are you and your law firm doing right now to become more “remarkable” in your clients’ and potential clients’ eyes?

Cordell M. Parvin built a national construction practice during his 35 years practicing law. At Jenkins & Gilchrist, Mr. Parvin was the Construction Law Practice Group Leader and was also responsible for the firm’s attorney development practice. While there he taught client development and created a coaching program for junior partners. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development and planning and client development. He is the co-author of *Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout* and other books for lawyers. To learn more visit his Web site, www.cordellparvin.com or contact him at cparvin@cordellparvin.com.